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Transatlantic Encounters: Eyewitness Testimony and Spain's First American Possessions, 1492-1536¹

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Abstract

We have eyewitness testimony from scores of the participants in the four voyages of Christopher Columbus as they gave depositions in the famous series of lawsuits between the Spanish crown and the Columbus family. Through these accounts, we can see a slowly developing picture of the lands and shores the witnesses had seen. We can observe the ceremonies the Spaniards used as they claimed possession of the lands they reached. We also catch glimpses of the reactions of the people they encountered in the Americas. The depositions also provide information about the later lives of the witnesses, many of whom left Europe and settled in the islands of the Caribbean, becoming citizens of the first European towns in the Caribbean and on the mainland of the Americas.

Keywords

Columbus family, lawsuits, ceremonies of possession, Caribbean, Atlantic, eyewitness accounts

Christopher Columbus's transatlantic voyage of 1492 was one of the last and certainly one of the most fateful of the medieval encounters. Rather than something new and unprecedented, it was a logical outcome of events and actions stretching back at least to the thirteenth century. From that time, Europeans had been trying to find a maritime route to what they knew were the riches of Asia. The earliest recorded effort was that of the Vivaldi brothers in the 1290s. Among the last of these medieval endeavors were the voyages

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of the Portuguese Bartolomew Dias, who reached the southern tip of the African continent and the southwestern reaches of the Indian Ocean in 1487-88. A decade later his countryman Vasco da Gama made the first round-trip voyage to India between 1497 and 1499.² Between the two came Columbus's initial voyage, in which he famously failed to discover a westward passage to Asia.

That voyage reached the Americas. Its participants and those of subsequent voyages followed medieval precedents as they explored, settled, and exploited.³ They drew on much experience of conquests in lands in Iberia, confrontations with Muslims in the western Mediterranean, settlement of islands in the Atlantic, and expeditions down the Atlantic coast of Africa. In the first decades of European exploration and settlement in the Americas following Columbus's first voyage, European knowledge of and imprint on the Caribbean islands and the nearby mainland gradually became apparent. If we look at the maps, it may seem as though the process was straight-line progress and clear. If we read the major sources, especially those of Columbus himself, we see it was a slow process, a piecemeal operation in which eyewitnesses could not agree on what they had found.

Columbus himself was always clear about what he thought he had found. He assumed it was Asia, in some part inexplicably not described by Marco Polo and the other sources of Asian lore and geography upon which he relied. His aim was to have the lands he found be pinned down carefully on the expanding map of European understanding as part of his increasingly desperate efforts to demonstrate the immediate profitability of such lands. The most ludicrous episode unfolded on the second voyage, when Columbus had his men swear that the Cuban coastline that they had been following for weeks was part of China. On his fourth voyage, he sought a strait in Central

² See, among others, Charles Verlinden, *The Medieval Origins of Modern Colonization* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970); J. R. S. Phillips, *The Medieval Expansion of Europe*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus: Exploration and Colonization from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, 1229-1492* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987); William D. Phillips, Jr., "The Medieval Origins of European Expansion" (James Ford Bell Lectures, no. 33, Associates of the James Ford Bell Library, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1996); *The Expansion of Europe: The First Phase*, ed. James Muldoon (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977).

³ For an introduction to the course and consequences of the Columbian voyages, see William D. Phillips, Jr., and Carla Rahn Phillips, *The Worlds of Christopher Columbus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

America leading, he hoped, to a passage to the high civilizations of Asia. He went to his grave asserting that it was Asia and never made a public pronouncement to the contrary.⁴

Luckily, we have other documents to set against Columbus's exaggerated propaganda. These include the accounts of other participants beginning with the second voyage, such as Michele de Cuneo and Dr. Chanca, the records and reports of crown officials, and above all a set of eyewitness accounts preserved as testimony in lawsuits pitting the descendants of Columbus against the Castilian crown.⁵ At stake was a definition of what Columbus had found and what others had reached. The Columbus family claimed that the mainland Columbus had reached on his third and fourth voyages was part of a continuous landmass from South to North America and that Columbus's titles and grants encompassed it all. The crown asserted a more limited definition: only those islands and mainlands upon which Columbus had actually landed. For the purposes of present-day historians, equally important are the details we find about the actions and attitudes of the participants as the encounter unfolded. Many of the officers and men who crewed the vessels remained in the Americas as colonists in the early stages of development of the Spanish empire.

The full history of the Columbian litigation need not detain us. The main cases contested between the family and the crown stretched on until the middle of the sixteenth century, and subsequent lawsuits among various members of the Columbus family lasted into the eighteenth century.⁶

⁴ For the best starting point, see the account by Fernando Colón, a teenaged participant on the fourth voyage, in his biography of his father. Fernando Colón, *The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus*, trans. Benjamin Keen, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992). See also *Repertorium Columbianum*, vol. 7: *Las Casas on Columbus: Background and the Second and Fourth Voyages*, ed. and trans. Nigel Griffin (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999). A recent popular account is Martin Dugard, *The Last Voyage of Columbus* (New York: Little, Brown, 2005).

⁵ For a convenient, complete edition of documents related to the Columbian actions, see *Cartas de particulares a Colón y relaciones coetáneas*, ed. Consuelo Varela and Juan Gil (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1984).

⁶ The quotations in this paper come from *Repertorium Columbianum*, vol. 8: *Testimonies from the Columbian Lawsuits* [hereafter *Testimonies*], ed. William D. Phillips, Jr. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000). That volume includes material selected and translated from the following volumes of *Pleitos colombinos*, ed. Antonio Muro Orejón et al. (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos, 1964-1989): *Probanzas del Almirante de las Indias (1512-1515)*, vol. 3; *Probanzas del Fiscal (1512-1515)*, vol. 4; *Rollo del proceso sobre la apelación de la Sentencia de*

What is crucial for knowledge of the early period is the body of depositions those lawsuits between the crown and the Columbus family produced. From 1512 to 1515 and 1535 to 1536, over two hundred witnesses offered testimony about their own experiences and what they had observed. Witnesses included those who had participated in the events of the Columbian voyages, those who had heard about the events from the participants, those who had witnessed the beginning or the end of the voyages, and others who had made different, non-Columbian voyages to the Americas. Both sides selected their own teams of witnesses and devised sets of questions that would, they hoped, elicit the desired answers. Witnesses could only answer the questions put to them, and their responses are of varying usefulness to modern scholars. They had no opportunity to offer their own full stories. In the most limited cases, the witnesses simply answered that they knew what a question asked, but in other cases they elaborated on what they had experienced, giving us additional valuable information. In most cases, we even lack the exact words of the witnesses, for the recording secretaries often paraphrased what the witnesses said in a third-person narrative.⁷ "To this question, the witness said..." was a common construction.

Obviously, partisanship crept in, despite promises of fairness. Equally as obvious, time and age sometimes made memories unreliable. The earlier set of depositions date from 1512 to 1515, two decades after the first voyage, and the later ones come from 1535 and 1536, some four decades after the events they recount. Such testimony must be used with care. Complete immersion in postmodern criticism is not necessary. A mere dip shows what the best historians have always known: that the sources cannot command total trust as accurate representations of the past but must be seen as representations of reality based on the imperfect tools of perception, memory, and point of view.

Even with these limitations, we can see a slowly developing picture of the lands and shores the witnesses had seen. We can observe the ceremonies the

Dueñas, vol. 8. For the history of the lawsuits themselves, see the introductions to the volumes cited above, as well as Otto Schoenrich, *The Legacy of Christopher Columbus: The Historic Litigations Involving His Discoveries, His Will, His Family, and His Descendants... Resulting from the Discovery of America*, 2 vols. (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark, 1949-50); and Ursula Lamb, "Lawsuits (Pleitos Colombinos)," in *The Christopher Columbus Encyclopedia*, 2 vols. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 2: 413-20.

⁷ Mark D. Johnston, "Philological Introduction," in *Testimonies*, 25-46, particularly for the legal language, 30-34.

Spaniards used as they claimed possession of the lands they reached. We also catch glimpses of the reactions of the people they encountered in the Americas. The depositions also provide information about the later lives of the witnesses, many of whom left Europe and settled in the islands of the Caribbean. By the time they made their depositions, they described themselves as citizens of the new towns they founded across the ocean from their homelands.

The mariners who explored the coastlines of the islands and mainland were used to living lives in which spatial mobility was a normal part of existence. Columbus himself had sailed extensively in the Mediterranean even before he went to Portugal in his twenties. Up until 1492, he had made voyages northward to the British Isles and perhaps Iceland and into the Atlantic, calling at the major islands and along the African coast nearly as far south as the equator. He was not alone in his frequent long-distance voyaging. Martín Alonso Pinzón, Columbus's chief lieutenant, was a skilled mariner and ship owner who had sailed throughout the western Mediterranean before 1492, including a trip to Rome shortly before preparations got underway for Columbus's first voyage to the New World.⁸ Martín Alonso Pinzón's son, Juan Martín Pinzón, was in Palos when the 1492 expedition departed, left almost immediately for a trip to Madeira, and returned to Palos in 1493 to find his father dead.⁹ Another son, Arias Pérez Pinzón, witnessed the ships leave Palos for the first voyage but did not sail on them. He made a trip to Flanders and was back in Galicia where he met his father in Bayona, when Martín Alonso Pinzón's ship made landfall on the return voyage.¹⁰ Rodrigo Alvarez, a citizen of Palos and a crewmember of the first part of Columbus's third voyage, fell ill and went ashore on the Portuguese-held island of Cape Verde. He recovered and made it back to Spain on his own by the time Columbus himself returned.¹¹ We can even see personal details in the statements of the witnesses. Pedro Ortiz saw the ships return from the first voyage as he was fishing between Spain and Morocco. The crews stopped to talk to him and to show him the Indians they brought with them. Ortiz testified that he would have gone on the first voyage himself, but for the opposition of

⁸ This is the testimony of Hernán Pérez Mateos, a cousin of Martín Alonso Pinzón, who was in Galicia to witness Pinzón's return from the first voyage. Deposition in Santo Domingo, January 26, 1536, in *Testimonies*, 244-6.

⁹ Deposition in Madrid, August 28, 1535, in *Testimonies*, 218.

¹⁰ Deposition in Palos, October 9, 1515, in *Testimonies*, 207.

¹¹ Deposition in Santo Domingo, September 5, 1514, in *Testimonies*, 72.

his father-in-law. It was probably a lucky thing for him, for many of those who left never returned but perished on Española. As it was, Ortiz lived a long life and was over seventy-five years of age when he testified in 1535.¹² Gonzalo Alonso Galeote also missed the first voyage, in his case due to illness, but went on the second voyage. He came from a family with a long-standing interest in exploration, for he testified that his father had previously traveled far out into the Atlantic but failed to find land.¹³

A champion firsthand witness was Diego Méndez. He said he had been in the town of Santa Fe, the royal camp during the final siege of Granada, when Columbus negotiated the contract for the first voyage with the Spanish monarchs, and he later witnessed their reception of Columbus in Barcelona after the first voyage. He was chief secretary for the fourth voyage, which ended in Jamaica when Columbus beached his two remaining vessels before they sank. Méndez led a desperate canoe trip to Española to report the admiral's plight and to arrange rescue. He later sailed all the coast of northern South America, and while in Cuba he witnessed the departure of the three initial expeditions to Mexico, those of Grijalva, Cortés, and Narváez. Testifying in Madrid in 1535, he gave his age as about sixty and reported that he was citizen of Santo Domingo.¹⁴ Méndez was not alone in keeping up the tradition of mobility after 1492. Brother Francisco de Bobadilla, of the order of Our Lady of Mercy, testified in Madrid at the same time as Méndez. He said that he had been on the coast of northern South America and as far north as Nicaragua for some fourteen years.¹⁵ Also testifying at the same time was Juan López de Archuleta, who had been on the same coast for some twenty years as a mariner and navigator. He learned more from his father-in-law, Diego de Porras, who had been on Columbus's fourth voyage. He had seen all the relevant maps and descriptions, including those made by Columbus. Equally important, he had talked with mariners who had sailed the western coast of South America as far as the Strait of Magellan and, accordingly, could testify that there was but one mainland.¹⁶

This was a crucial piece of testimony, for one key to the dispute between the crown and the Columbus family revolved around a central question. Had

¹² Deposition in Seville, December 15, 1535, in *Testimonies*, 229.

¹³ Deposition in San Salvador (Cuba), February 16, 1515, in *Testimonies*, 115.

¹⁴ Deposition in Madrid, August 31, 1535, in *Testimonies*, 254-5.

¹⁵ *Testimonies*, 250-1.

¹⁶ *Testimonies*, 251-2.

Columbus found and claimed only discrete parts of the territories in Central and South America, as the crown's attorneys contended? Or was there, as the lawyers for the Columbus family countered, only one mainland, from the Strait of Magellan, up both coasts of South America, through Central America, and on to Florida and the "land of the cods," in today's Atlantic maritime Canada?¹⁷

There was some lack of agreement about this, even as late as the mid-1530s. In the depositions that each side presented, we can see details about the techniques of sixteenth-century navigation. It is clear from other sources that Columbus and his fellow navigators used the compass, quadrants, and dead reckoning to find their way. Witnesses in the lawsuits testified that Columbus used a quadrant and made a sphere and detailed maritime charts as he proceeded.¹⁸ Columbus later gave his nautical charts to Juan de la Cosa, who copied them and used them for his own voyages.¹⁹ They employed other, more traditional methods that proved effective. Shortly before landfall on the first voyage, they noted land birds flying above and assumed that they were close to land.²⁰

The work of the European navigators and pilots received the aid of native informants. Alonso Ojeda, who later made voyages of his own to South America, testified that he had received information from an Indian who told him about lands to the south of Española, so that Columbus, on the third voyage, went by a southerly route and encountered the island of Trinidad and the nearby South American mainland.²¹ Antón García testified that when he visited South America south of the Orinoco in company with Diego de Lepe and others, they believed that "before this neither the admiral nor anyone else had arrived there because the Indians had no memory of having seen Christians and they were astounded at what they saw."²² Diego de Morales offered a similar explanation about what happened when he traveled with Alonso Ojeda along the South American coast west of the Paria peninsula. "Asked how he knows that no Christian had gone there before, he said that

¹⁷ The contending views are set out in the questions each side had its witnesses answer.

¹⁸ Depositions of Pablos Martín and Cristóbal de Torres, San Germán (on the island of San Juan, now Puerto Rico), January 12, 1515, in *Testimonies*, 101-3.

¹⁹ Deposition in Guanabo (Cuba), March 17, 1515, in *Testimonies*, 132.

²⁰ Deposition of Juan Domínguez, Seville, December 15, 1535, in *Testimonies*, 239-40; deposition of Bartolomé de Arriola, Palos, October 16, 1515, in *Testimonies*, 201.

²¹ Deposition in Santo Domingo, December 7, 1512, in *Testimonies*, 136.

²² Deposition in Santo Domingo, December 7, 1512, in *Testimonies*, 142.

they asked the Indians of those lands, who said no Christian had arrived there.”²³ Pedro de Toledo, presented as one of the witnesses selected by the Columbus family, said that when he traveled on a later voyage to the Paria peninsula, the ship’s captain and pilot and “the [local] Indians . . . who traveled with them” told him that Paria was on the mainland and that there was only one coast.²⁴ Juan Ferrón de Posada testified to the same effect, because “the Indians of that land said it.”²⁵

Obviously, Europeans and Indians were communicating from an early stage. In Bartolomé de las Casas’s redaction of Columbus’s log of the first voyage, it is apparent that right after the initial encounter, the Spaniards were learning the local languages just as the Indians were learning Spanish.²⁶ Columbus seems to have had a tin ear for native languages. Like the Portuguese as they went down the African coast, the Spaniards obtained native interpreters, most often by force. During the first voyage, the earliest communications were by sign language.²⁷ Columbus apparently failed to learn to speak with the Indians on the first voyage, unlike others among his crew who did.²⁸ In all the voyages, Columbus and the captains of other expeditions used interpreters whom they exchanged as they went along. For example, on the fourth voyage, as they approached the Central American coast, an Indian interpreter told them an island contained gold, but they declined to land on it due to the surrounding shallow waters.²⁹ By the time of the fourth voyage, when Columbus’s expedition reached Veragua, one witness, obviously understanding the local language, reported “that he heard how the Indians

²³ Deposition in Santo Domingo, December 7, 1512, in *Testimonies*, 144.

²⁴ Deposition in Santo Domingo, September 5, 1514, in *Testimonies*, 73.

²⁵ Deposition in Santo Domingo, September 5, 1514, in *Testimonies*, 74.

²⁶ The story of the learning of languages and the exchange of vocabulary is a fascinating one that deserves more extensive scholarly treatment. See, among others, eds., *The Language Encounter in the Americas, 1492-1800*, ed. Edward G. Gray and Norman Fiering (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002). For the present discussion, the most important essay in the book is Frances Karttunen, “Interpreters Snatched from the Shore: The Successful and the Others,” 215-29. Also see Karttunen’s *Interpreters, Guides, and Survivors* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

²⁷ *The Diario of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage to America, 1492-1493*, ed. and trans. Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley, Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 135, 137, 146.

²⁸ For examples of Columbus’s failure to understand his native informants, see *The Diario of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage to America*, 195, 207, 245.

²⁹ Deposition of Gonzalo Díaz, San Salvador (Cuba), February 16, 1515, in *Testimonies*, 125.

asked the Christians if they had come from heaven and that this witness asked the Indians if they had seen other Christians and people of his sort and they said no.”³⁰

The testimony offer us some fascinating glimpses into the encounters between the Europeans and the Indians. In 1512 the Spanish crown issued orders that, as part of the ceremonies of possession, the indigenous people were to be read a *Requerimiento* (literally, a request or requirement). It called upon those who heard it to recognize the authority of God, the Catholic church, and the Spanish monarchy.³¹ Its manifest limitation was that it was to be read in Spanish, not in a language that the local people could understand. By the time the *Requerimiento* was enacted, Columbus had been dead for six years, and all the testimony of the witnesses in the Columbian lawsuits related to earlier events and earlier ceremonies, the forms of which were surprisingly varied.

Las Casas’s redaction of the log of the first landfall provides a description of the events as Columbus took possession of the first island for the Spanish monarchs:

[T]he Admiral [Columbus] went ashore in the armed launch, and Martín Alonso Pinzón and his brother Vicente Anes, who was captain of the *Niña*. The Admiral brought out the royal banner and the captains two flags with the green cross, which the Admiral carried on all the ships as a standard, with an F and a Y [for Fernando and Isabel], and over each letter a crown, one on one side of the † and the other on the other. . . . The Admiral called on the others who jumped ashore and to Rodrigo Descobedo, the *escri-vano* of the whole fleet, and to Rodrigo Sánchez de Segovia; and he said that they should be witnesses that, in the presence of all, he would take, as he did in fact take, possession of the said island for the king and for the queen his lords, making the declarations that were required, and which at more length are contained in the testimonials made there in writing.³²

During the third voyage, the expedition reached the Paria peninsula, and Columbus “ordered the people who came in the ships to go ashore, and this witness was one of them, and [Columbus] took possession of the province of Paria for the king and queen our lords, and they put a great cross planted in

³⁰ Deposition of Rodrigo de Escobar, Santo Domingo, June 12, 1512, in *Testimonies*, 55.

³¹ Patricia Seed examined the medieval background for the *Requerimiento* in *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe’s Conquest of the New World, 1492–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 67–99.

³² *The Diario of Christopher Columbus’s First Voyage to America*, 63, 65.

the ground. . . .”³³ Miguel de Toro reported that when he traveled with Alonso Ojeda in 1499 to Paria, “they found signs on it, from which they believed that the admiral had already arrived there because they found crosses set up and by the speech of the Indians, who named the admiral. . . .”³⁴ On his voyage of 1499-1500, Vicente Yáñez Pinzón sailed from the Cape Verde Islands and reached the northeast coast of Brazil. After going north a little way, he named the region Rostro Hermoso and, as Louis-André Vigneras puts it, “took possession of the land for Castile, following the usual procedure of pacing back and forth, drinking water from a stream, cutting down branches, carving his name and those of the King and Queen on rocks and on tree trunks.”³⁵ García Fernández, a physician of Palos, was present on the expedition and described it in this way: Vicente Yáñez Pinzón “went ashore with a number of his people and four squires from each one of her highness’s ships and he and his people cut trees and drank water in order to attest to her highness and as a sign of possession they made some crosses and gave the name Rostro Hermoso to where they went the day that land was discovered.”³⁶ Another participant was Diego Fernández Colmenero. He reported that “Vicente Yáñez and this witness took possession of the land for their highnesses and cut many branches and in principal places they made crosses as a sign of taking possession of the land and put other wooden crosses there.”³⁷ Diego de Lepe took another expedition to South America in 1499 and held a ceremony of possession somewhere in the vicinity of the mouth of the Amazon. Pedro Medel of Palos was present and described the event: “As a sign of his taking possession, [Diego de Lepe] cut trees and made crosses from some of the larger trees, all for the king and queen of Castile.”³⁸

At the time of Columbus’s fourth voyage, upon reaching Veragua, “the admiral took possession of that land in the name of the king and queen our lords and with banners and trumpets.”³⁹ The eyewitness Hernán Gutiérrez de Gibaja agreed and said that all along the coast during the voyage “he saw the

³³ Deposition of Hernando Pacheco, Santo Domingo, June 12, 1512, in *Testimonies*, 59.

³⁴ Deposition in Puerto Rico, September 30, 1514, in *Testimonies*, 89.

³⁵ Vigneras, *The Discovery of South America and the Andalusian Voyages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 71.

³⁶ Deposition in Palos, October 1, 1515, in *Testimonies*, 188.

³⁷ Deposition in Palos, October 1, 1515, in *Testimonies*, 196.

³⁸ Deposition in Palos, October 1, 1515, in *Testimonies*, 194.

³⁹ Deposition of Rodrigo de Escobar, Santo Domingo, June 12, 1512, in *Testimonies*, 55.

admiral plant flags in these places for the king and queen of Castile. . . .⁴⁰
On that same voyage, Diego Méndez reported that

when the armada reached the place called the point of Caxinas, which is to the east of the islands of the Guanajes, near the cape of Honduras, don Cristóbal Colón ordered his brother the *adelantado* (a term denoting a frontier governor) don Bartolomé Colón to go ashore with the royal standard of Castile and to claim all those lands for their majesties, and that the *adelantado* with the flag and the people who left with him cut tree branches and dug in the ground with a spade to claim it all for their majesties, and he commanded this witness, who was present, that, as chief scribe of the armada, he should tell it as testimony and that he record it in this way in his registers, and that is what he did.⁴¹

Bartolomé Colón, Columbus's brother and frequently his second in command, described the occasion more laconically: when the expedition coasted Central America, he himself "took possession in the name of their highnesses with trumpets and the flag unfolded because at the time the admiral don Cristóbal Colón was too poorly disposed to do it."⁴² Another witness, Gonzalo Camacho, was less precise in his testimony but nonetheless added important details:

[H]e is not very sure on which spot of land [Bartolomé Colón] took possession of it because so much time has passed, but this witness remembers that it was on the mainland that admiral don Cristóbal Colón discovered, and he also remembers that when he claimed the land, don Bartolomé Colón performed many acts such as digging the land and cutting the branches of the trees with his own sword, saying that he was claiming it in the name of their highnesses the Catholic monarchs don Fernando and doña Isabel of glorious memory. . . .⁴³

Another witness testified that he was present on the same voyage and "went ashore and helped make the crosses. . . ."⁴⁴ Juan de Quexo was also present and saw the crosses made. He also noted a fascinating detail: "[W]ith the sails of the ships they made awnings in the form of a church and mass was said there

⁴⁰ Deposition in Madrid, August 31, 1535, in *Testimonies*, 256.

⁴¹ Deposition in Madrid, August 31, 1535, in *Testimonies*, 254–5.

⁴² *Testimonies*, 64.

⁴³ Deposition in Seville, December 31, 1535, in *Testimonies*, 260.

⁴⁴ Deposition of Diego Rodríguez Simón, Palos, January 5, 1536, in *Testimonies*, 266.

by a Franciscan friar who was there, and by Juan Martinelo, a clergyman from [Palos] who went on that armada. . . ."⁴⁵

Two witnesses reported the actions of Indians who encountered Europeans for the first time. Ramiro Ramírez recounted what had happened on the Central American coast during the fourth voyage:

[T]he Indians left two young women on the beach and the admiral had them put on board a ship and he caused them to be dressed and given shoes and he ordered them returned to where they had been left and he did not allow any injury to be done to them, and the Indians returned for them and undressed them and left what had been given them and they took them away and . . . they smelled the clothing of the Christians and marveled to see the Christians. . . ."⁴⁶

Testifying at the same time as Ramírez, Hernando Pacheco testified about a similar event during the third voyage, when Columbus's men landed on the Paria Peninsula. "[A]s the boat reached shore this witness saw how the Indians of the province marveled and came to the boat and smelled it. . . ."⁴⁷ Obviously, the indigenous people were assimilating an understanding of the Europeans and the European objects they encountered.

Not all was peaceful. Several witnesses testified to violence between the native peoples and the newcomers. Pedro de Tudela was asked if he knew "that . . . the admiral . . . found and discovered an island . . . called Guanasa, where the Indians brought a great present to the admiral and the *adelantado* his brother in his name, who went ashore, and a canoe was taken with many things and people, among whom was taken one named Ynubera to whom was given the name Juan Pérez." Tudela responded that he had heard from the participants when they reached Española "that the Indians hurt and wounded and killed some Christians. . . ."⁴⁸ Later during the same voyage, Columbus and his brother Bartolomé Colón built a town in the river of Veragua:

And when the town was built and finished and don Cristóbal wanted to return to Española, the Indians became angry to see them take possession of their land, and when two boats went upstream from Veragua, the Indians rose up against the people in these boats, who were Christians, and they killed all the people and no one escaped except for one

⁴⁵ Deposition in Palos, January 5, 1536, in *Testimonies*, 268.

⁴⁶ Deposition in Santo Domingo, June 16, 1512, in *Testimonies*, 58.

⁴⁷ Deposition in Santo Domingo, June 16, 1512, in *Testimonies*, 59.

⁴⁸ Deposition in Puerto Rico, September 30, 1514, in *Testimonies*, 88.

man, and from there the admiral left with two ships and they went along the coast to another port that is called Retrete and they were anchored for a number of days and the Indians rose up and fought with the Christians and they killed many Indians.⁴⁹

The Europeans ultimately triumphed. Indigenous resistance could not stop their advance. The victors founded towns on the Spanish model and began to Europeanize their new possessions. Some of them cut ties with their places of birth and described themselves unselfconsciously as citizens of the newly founded towns. By 1515, Rodrigo de Bastidas, Andrés de Morales, and Diego de Alfaro all testified that they were citizens of the town of Santo Domingo on the island of Española.⁵⁰ By the 1530s, six others noted their citizenship in Santo Domingo.⁵¹ Indigenous geographical designations were disappearing, replaced by names designated by the Europeans, just as major portions of the indigenous population were vanishing. Possession was complete; the encounter had been domesticated.

⁴⁹ Deposition in Seville, February 12, 1513, in *Testimonies*, 154.

⁵⁰ *Testimonies*, 134, 139, 170.

⁵¹ *Testimonies*, 244–9.

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